

INCOME TACKS: FROM MY DIARY

1.

A curious thing, the English word --
for plain speaking, wonderful,
but takes almost a miracle
born of adversity
or the kind of genius that I'm not
to make it sing:

Overlooking the wintry
supermarket parking lot,
tip-top on a bare tree,
a solitary bird
pouring its heart out,
breast quivering.

2.

If only I was the one
before writing was discovered
to whom it occurred
that the spoken word
could be written down
or chiseled in stone,

and having only heard them spoken,
I was the one to have found
that words could each be broken
into separate units of sound,

and even better,
that each one of these
with elegance and ease
could be written in shape of a letter.

3.

Listening to Jewish songs
reminds me of all my unshed tears.

4.

Try to remember in the difficult hours:
Every problem is a teaching.

5.

My instructions: Let it all go.
Let what go?
Stop asking and just do it --
you know.

6.

When he came to, people were holding his arms
trying to calm him down.

Had he actually been running around
naked through the streets, shouting
he was sick of the whole mess?

He felt terribly confused -- perhaps he was insane
or at any rate out of control.

And would he go off again that way?

7.

The reason I need to write poetry is
I keep forgetting important things --
like my feelings.

8.

Don't talk to me about 'dropping the Mind'
and other fake-spiritual notions:
The intellect is the best critic
and corrective to the emotions.

9.

While shaving my face, I answer my critics,
marshalling rebuttals, and arguing
my right to write as I want to:
Who are you to tell me what to do?
You don't have the least idea what poetry's about,
etcetera ...

and going over and over where the chin
makes its difficult transition to the neck:
Why can't a clown for once cry real tears?

Oh, I say, you pompous ass.

10.

I have one eye of reality
and one of woe,
but where is my eye of pleasure?
In reality is my pleasure --

but I'll admit to another eye,
if you could call it an eye,
somewhere down below.

11.

How I wonder at anyone able to say:
When I look at my face
I feel tender toward myself.

12.

I'm committed to being beautiful
but that doesn't mean I ignore
what is not its opposite but its twin --
I revel in ugliness like a new-found freedom.

13.

I only like parts of waking
but every part of sleeping.

14.

Not have been circumcised by a rabbi but a doctor,
my etheric body is uncircumcised still,
making it difficult connecting on both levels --
the confusion lies in their not being
together, one and the same
and I find myself supplying
an imaginary foreskin.

15.

I still feel I should desire women
but at least I'm sure now I don't.

16.

Stories from the Lives of My Friends

One went crazy in Tangier
not only from kif and drugs
but when he learned the truth about
his friends in the medina there:
Each a murderer or had hired killer thugs,
and one of them threatened to 'rub him out.'

Two others, after years together, thought
an arrangement of a looser kind
might suit them better, so they split,
but in an unexpected twist of plot
one of them went blind
and they moved back in together again.
It could hardly be taken as a gift
yet, oddly, they were as happy then
as any two friends who ever lived --
though sex was not the key to it.

17.

Leading him through the streets
he is like an animal beside me,
a blind lion or horse in captivity,
wind blowing through his proud mane,
for whom to hold on to my shoulder
is necessary, but a humiliation.

18.

Guide Dog Sonnet

Some dogs live a life of ease,
playing with children, being taken out for walks,
while others, and maybe the lucky ones are these,
have to work, pulling carts, doing circus tricks,
guarding property, or as I do,
leading my master through streets to be his eyes.

There, if a friendly dog invites me to
a sniffing fest of assholes, noses, pricks,
I can't forget that though I have my needs
it's in my master's safety duty lies.
And if we pass a hydrant and I've got to go
lift my leg, I must say firmly no.

Not for a biscuit do I make this sacrifice:
Being useful is how I get my kicks.

19.

Being a couple, with the resources of two,
in public impact you benefit
because the combined effect of both of you
more than doubles it.

20

The Psychology of Couples

Each becomes, after years, an expert on the other,
an enraging quality you could kill for.

The goal: Weaken your mate, make him dependent --
an outsider can always tell who's on top.

Revenge is a complex game
and brother, nothing is forgotten.
It's a lifelong struggle as you get
a death grip on each other.

21

A Terrifying Line

Ladies and gentlemen,
we are approaching the German border.

22.

Economic solution: Put ad in paper:

Strong feminist poetry wanted,
nominal expense,
guaranteed publication.

Another, shorter and cheaper:

Sure cure for impotence,
send donation.

23.

Old New Yorkers, no matter where we go,
are forever part of the garbage we left behind:
Beating the junkman and the truck to it,
we furnish our wardrobes with what we find --
jeans, shirts, fur coat, sweater --
in the supermarket of the garbage can are better
things than in the store.

But then the city passed a law
and dog owners dutifully began
picking up the dog shit
and dumping it in the nearest can --
no thanks, I don't need any more of it,
and left the treasures from then on.

24.

You know but do not dare to know.
It's because of that you ask them how,
if the baby comes out of momma,
it looks like dad ... a pitiful sight
the way they blush and stammer,
and you know instantly you were right.

25.

At fifty-two I understood coffee,
the martini at fifty-three,
and after sciatica at fifty-four --
aspirin plus coffee plus a shot of liquor.

26.

The ears of old men,
like their dicks, grow flaccid.
Boys' ears are crisp,
or you might say, stiff.

27.

That of which I'm most afraid
is not the inevitable hearing aid
but ending up one of the park benchers,
each with pacemaker and dentures,
a replacement socket for the hip,
and an aluminum walker lest I slip.

28.

In the corner of the garden where I pee
the nettles grow fiercely big and bristly,
fed perhaps by something in the urine filtered
through the soil,

and growing bolder, attracted by the spray
that gives their leaves a gloss,
they start leaning into the spot I aim at
so I can't fail to pee directly on them,

but undiluted, it's too hot, too strong,
and the boldest wither under it.

29.

You men with superior technological minds,
you invent devices of all kinds --
atomic missiles, atom plants, and bombs.

But what do we do if disaster comes,
cracking the atom-generating station
and leaking poison radiation?
Where do the deadly wastes go, and even more,
what about atomic war?

Come boys, isn't there more to figure out?
But this you do not care about.

30.

To Whatever Future Race Survives

We seem about to destroy ourselves,
and if we do,
I want you to know that at least
some of us knew.

-- Edward Field

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